



3S RECIPE - Smart Shrinkage Solutions Fostering Resilient Cities in Inner Peripheries of Europe

STOKE-ON-TRENT (UK) POLICY BRIEF #4 • LIVEABILITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief showcases a successful initiative to improve urban liveability in a shrinking city through repurposing its historical heritage. It shows how old industrial buildings could be used to accommodate new creative arts entrepreneurs and host high profile cultural events. The brief focusses on **Spode Works**, a 10-acre bone china pottery and homewares production site located in Stoke-on-Trent – a medium-size polycentric industrial city in central England¹, coping with population loss. Building on local knowledge and stakeholders' experiences of using the Spode site **after the factory's closure in 2009**, this brief demonstrates how a shrinking city can challenge a negative stereotype, raise its profile, and improve attractiveness by generating new creative arts and culture dynamics from within the effectively repurposed old industrial assets. The key lesson learnt is that to enhance liveability one should not drive it down to specific concerns like housing, jobs, or leisure. **Urban liveability is about the dynamism and wider significance of a place.** These qualities can be improved by a **visionary local authority, enthusiastic civil society, and risk-taking private sector partners**, all committed to urban regeneration and raising the city profile through the development of local creative capacity for impactful events and knowledge exchange.



INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Stoke-on-Trent actors have undertaken a series of initiatives aimed at making the city more attractive and liveable, including improvements in the social and private sector housing provision, tourist infrastructure developments, and civic-led creative arts projects. The local art and culture community and other stakeholders have acknowledged the city's untapped potential for creativity and innovation. Building on the rich fabric of community life in the Potteries, several community-led projects² have been very successful in renewing the creative arts dynamic of Stoke-on-Trent and strengthening the city's importance within the broader national cultural landscape. These initiatives have ranged from grassroots festivals, neighbourhood lantern parades, and the restoration of green spaces and water canals, to creative consultations, civic pride celebrations, drama, performance, outdoor and indoor installation art.³ Amongst the most successful ideas that the local art and culture community in the Potteries has worked hard to make happen involves reusing and repurposing redundant industrial

¹ Stoke-on-Trent (pop. 255,833) is a local authority created in 1910 through federation of six historical towns – The Potteries – including Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton, with an area of 36 square miles [93 km²]. The municipality was granted city status in 1925 by King George V during a personal visit to emphasise its importance as the centre of the china and pottery industry.

² E.g., see B Arts (2020) at <https://www.b-arts.org.uk/core-work>.

³ B Arts (2020). 'Grassroots Festival', <https://www.b-arts.org.uk/grassroots-festival>; 'Creative Consultation', <https://www.b-arts.org.uk/creative-consultation>; 'Outdoor Art', <https://www.b-arts.org.uk/outdoor-art>.

and retail spaces, buildings, and shop floors for the production, exhibition, and consumption of creative arts (Ault, 2019).

IMPROVING URBAN LIVEABILITY THROUGH CREATIVE ARTS AND CULTURE

In 2009, the Josiah Spode's historic Spode factory – the birthplace of **fine bone china** (c. 1770) – closed its gates for good. The bankruptcy of operating company *Royal Worcester and Spode* left 400 people out of work

and a vast (10 acres / 4 ha) brownfield site, located next door to the Stoke-on-Trent City Council headquarters, to deal with. With the help of local design and creative arts professionals, and other stakeholders, including the local authority, an idea of a festival was launched to celebrate contemporary ceramics from across the world to be hosted in the heart of the world's ceramics industry.



Award 2015. China Halls. Spode Works. Photo © Joel Fildes for British Ceramics Biennial

The **British Ceramics Biennial** (BCB) first took place in 2009, set at Spode in the **China Halls**, and expanding to various established venues and non-traditional spaces across the city. It returned in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, and was back in 2019 for the sixth time. Over the first decade of its existence, BCB has built up a programme of projects of artists' residencies, fellowships, commissions, educational, and enterprise projects running year round. In general, the festival serves as a catalyst for regeneration in the region and a platform for innovation and excellence celebrating the best in current ceramic practices. With the help of *The Clay Foundation*, a registered charity, it is run by a team of arts and creative practitioners in partnership with a range of other creative, cultural, educational, business, and community organisations across the city.⁴ Utilising the success of the BCB 2009, the local arts and culture community has been able to attract funding from a series of national and European government-funded bodies and philanthropic charitable organisations (including *Art Council England*, the *Esmée Fairbairn Foundation*, the *Tudor Trust*, the *Foyle Foundation*, the *City of Stoke-on-Trent Council*, the *UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport*, *YMCA*, *BBC Children in Need*, *Co-op Foundation*, *Paul Hamlyn Foundation*, and *The Geoff Herrington Foundation*) to support and further expand its activities aimed at making Stoke-on-Trent a more interesting place to live, work, and play through arts and culture events in redundant buildings and spaces.

Capitalising on the success of the British Ceramics Biennial, *B Arts*, a participatory arts company based in North Staffordshire, together with seven other organisations, has consequently run **Artcity** – a five-year project



⁴ BCB (2020). 'British Ceramics Biennial', <https://www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/>.



aimed at: i) creating opportunities that could draw artists to live, work and show work in Stoke-on-Trent; ii) providing promising young local artists with a reason to remain in the Potteries; and iii) helping create a new positive narrative for Stoke-on-Trent, built on its cultural life and creative past, present and future. Developed with the support of Arts Council England, AirSpace Gallery, B Arts, Bitjam, Cultural Sisters, Letting in the Light, PiCL, and Restoke, **Artcity** has been successful in bringing life back to Stoke-on-Trent’s disused industrial spaces with artistic events and exhibitions. The programme has also opened up ‘meanwhile’, abandoned, and non-arts spaces across the Potteries for temporary use by artists.⁵ ArtCity has enabled artistic activity and reuse of various redundant spaces, including gardens, canals, and empty shops, in an effort to encourage arts graduate retention and urban renewal.



Etruria Canals Festival is the area’s largest celebration of canals and canal heritage (on the left, see photo © Natalie Willatt for B Arts, 2018).

Noticeably, during its duration in 2014-2019, the programme faced a major challenge in delivering the long-term objective to increase arts graduate retention. The time of **great fiscal austerity**, which followed in the UK the global financial crisis of 2007-08, has been characterised by a steady decline in the overall number of students choosing higher education, in general, across the Potteries conurbation. Over the last five years (for which the data are available), the absolute number of undergraduate students from Stoke-on-Trent entering higher education decreased by 18%, from 6,772 (2010-11) to 5,562 (2015-16). Moreover, the **number of undergraduates** remaining to study at home, in the two local universities, **decreased by 33%**, from 2,960 in 2010-11 to 1,994 in 2015-16. By striking contrast, during Artcity, the share of **local creative arts and design undergraduates** (domiciled in Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme), who chose to study locally at Staffordshire and Keele Universities, **increased** from 36.5% in 2013-14 to **37.8%** in 2015-16. ‘Arts, entertainment, and recreation’, as a whole, have become the fourth most popular graduate employment sector in the city, following healthcare, education, and retail. The number of **successful local grant applications** to Arts Council England has **more than doubled**, from 8 in 2013-14 to 20 in 2016-17, with the **total grant capture** increasing during this period from £234,238 to **£487,304**. The number of new and existing **arts companies** registered in Stoke-on-Trent with the Companies House has also been **rapidly growing**, from 4 in 2013-14 to **22** in 2016-17. Local **arts company turnover** data have also reported the rapid rise in total turnover from £4,541,714 in 2013-14 to **£8,309,371** in 2015-16.

EFFECTIVELY REPURPOSING INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE: PRACTICAL MECHANISMS

To identify the practical mechanisms driving successful repurposing of Spode Works, we have used a distinctive in-house *Urban Futures Method* designed to facilitate stakeholders’ collective reflection on and learning about this particular smart shrinkage solution, its benefits, and necessary conditions for effective urban regeneration (Lombardi et al, 2012). During a special *Urban Futures* workshop on 12 March 2019, hosted by B Arts in Stoke, the local actors involved in or influenced by creative arts projects highlighted a dozen of beneficial outcomes for the city and identified specific enabling conditions to improve liveability, as follows:

Outcome	What are the necessary conditions that make it happen?
1. International exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continued support (promotion) from the regional Chamber of CommerceWider tourism infrastructure – hotels, restaurants and cafés, public transportDigital tourist application

⁵ Arts Council England (2020). ‘Artcity’, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/case-studies/making-stoke-trent-home-arts-and-culture>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained support from the local authority & partners
2. Sustained & regularised activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained support from the local authority & partners
3. Knowledge conduit [transfer]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to engage and utilise knowledge • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • Continued support from the regional Chamber of Commerce
4. Marketing the city inside & outside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued support from the regional Chamber of Commerce • A coherent message • Wider tourism infrastructure – hotels, restaurants and cafés, public transport • Sustained support from the local authority & partners
5. Social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Social space’ • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • Local university & college arts’ courses
6. Tourism economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider tourism infrastructure – hotels, restaurants and cafés, public transport • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • Continued support from the regional Chamber of Commerce • Local university & college arts’ courses
7. Work for artists (and associated activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council support with rents, infrastructure, bus routes and frequency • Being <i>not a traditional</i> city-centre • Funding • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • A wider cultural community
8. Framework – focus for activities & partnerships across cultural sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • A wider cultural community
9. Modelling for Spode Works [showcasing]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authority commitment to vision for reused / repurposed industrial heritage • Sustained support from the local authority & partners
10. Local authority agenda-setting – funding the arts and benefits of that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative support from the local authority • Local authority commitment to vision for reused / repurposed industrial heritage • Sustained support from the local authority & partners
11. Artisan economy – the creative class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained support from the local authority & partners • Local university & college arts’ courses

RECOMMENDATIONS: LEARNING FROM THE SPODE EXPERIMENT

➤ Sustained support from partners and tourism infrastructure are needed for the BCB and related Spode Works’ initiatives to improve the international exposure of Stoke-on-Trent

North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, local authorities, and other partners should continue to support and promote BCB and other events at Spode to ensure they continue as regularised activities. The success of arts, music, exhibition, and other events at Spode Works will depend on good quality tourism infrastructure. To improve the experience of visitors to reused industrial heritage sites, to make such events more enjoyable, good quality hotels and retail options, a range of restaurants and cafés, and efficient public transport have to be in place. The development of digital tourism application should also be considered.

➤ BCB and related events should be used to showcase Spode Works as an impactful reuse of a post-industrial space

Arts, culture, music, and entertainment events organised in Spode Works can demonstrate a physical example of how a shrinking industrial city can effectively repurpose a post-industrial space in a way that it becomes an attractive tourism destination. Such a strategy requires a change in the local authority’s perception and a commitment to a new vision for disused industrial spaces, because local authorities are often the landlords.

➤ Interactions during arts, culture, and music events at repurposed industrial heritage sites are a vehicle for knowledge exchange

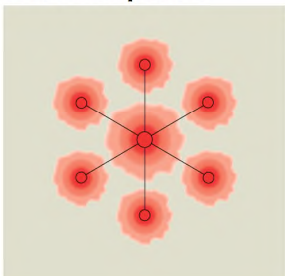

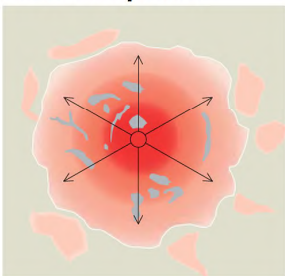
International festivals like the BCB bring different artists and a range of ideas into the city and many ideas are taken out of the city. Regular festival events hosted in reused industrial buildings should integrate and fertilise the new ideas into a solid local knowledge base. For this to work properly, people need the capacity to engage and utilise this circulating specialist knowledge. Further commitment and support is required from the North

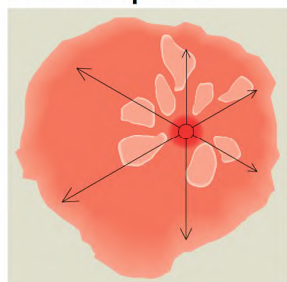


Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, the local authority, and other stakeholders, in addition to active commercial players.

WOULD THE REPURPOSED SPODE WORKS DELIVER THE SAME BENEFITS WHATEVER THE FUTURE BRINGS?

Repurposing the Spode site through the BCB, ArtCity, and other creative arts-driven initiatives offers a strategic solution to urban shrinkage by making Stoke-on-Trent a more attractive and eventful place. This enhances the city's liveability and adds to its **creative** and **quirky urban identity**, augmenting the economic and cultural wealth of the Potteries in the long-run. However, maintaining cultural activities in shrinking cities can be a difficult task that not only requires conducive local conditions but also needs an enabling political economy environment. The latter, however, is typically a very dynamic phenomenon, fluctuating beyond the control by any local actor. Local decision-makers may still be able to ensure that their activities and outcomes bring benefits to the city, despite rapid political, economic, and technological changes and transformations. This policy brief offers a method to make culture-led initiatives more resilient to and sustainable in unpredictable future events: during this project, we have tested the likely future performance of each urban regeneration-related 'smart shrinkage solution-benefit pair' – that is, actions taken today in the name of sustainable urban development – in a series of possible future scenarios for the year 2060. Four **plausible but distinct** future scenarios were included into our analysis (Lombardi *et. al.*, 2012: Table 2). A summary of these four global **urban future scenarios** is as follows:

New Sustainability Paradigm (NSP)		Key driver: Equity and sustainability
Settlement pattern 	Description An ethos of 'one planet living' facilitates a shared vision for more sustainable living and a much improved quality of life. New socio-economic arrangements result in changes to the character of urban industrial civilisation. Local is valued but global links also play a role. A sustainable and more equitable future is emerging from new values, a revised model of development and the active engagement of civil society.	Philosophy The worldview of the <i>New Sustainability Paradigm</i> has few historical precedents, although John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century political economist, was prescient in theorising a post-industrial and post-scarcity social arrangement based on human development rather than material acquisition (Mill, 1848).
Policy Reform (PR)		Key driver: Economic growth with greater equity
Settlement pattern 	Description <i>Policy Reform</i> depends on comprehensive and coordinated government action for poverty reduction and environmental sustainability, negating trends toward high inequality. The values of consumerism and individualism persist, creating a tension with policies that prioritise sustainability.	Philosophy In <i>Policy Reform</i> , the belief is that markets require strong policy guidance to address inherent tendencies toward economic crisis, social conflict and environmental degradation. John Maynard Keynes, influenced by the Great Depression, is an important predecessor of those who hold that it is necessary to manage capitalism in order to temper its crises (Keynes, 1936).
Market Forces (MF)		Key driver: Competitive, open global markets
Settlement pattern 	Description <i>Market Forces</i> relies on the self-correcting logic of competitive markets. Current demographic, economic, environmental, and technological trends unfold without major surprise. Competitive, open and integrated markets drive world development. Social and environmental concerns are secondary.	Philosophy The <i>Market Forces</i> bias is one of market optimism, the faith that the hidden hand of well-functioning markets is the key to resolving social, economic and environmental problems. An important philosophic antecedent is Adam Smith (1776), while contemporary representatives include many neo-classical economists and free market enthusiasts.

Fortress World (FW)**Key driver: Protection and control of resources****Settlement pattern****Description**

Powerful individuals, groups and organisations develop an authoritarian response to the threats of resource scarcity and social breakdown by forming alliances to protect their own interests. Security and defensibility of resources are paramount for these privileged rich elites. An impoverished majority exists outside the fortress. Policy and regulation exist but enforcement may be limited. Armed forces act to impose order, protect the environment and prevent a societal collapse.

Philosophy

The *Fortress World* mindset was foreshadowed by the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1651), who held a pessimistic view of the nature of man and saw the need for powerful leadership. While it is rare to find modern Hobbesians, many people believe, in their resignation and anguish, that some kind of a *Fortress World* is the logical outcome of the unattended social polarisation and environmental degradation they observe.

The Urban Future Method does not favour any particular scenario. Indeed, for a solution to be determined to be robust and resilient to future change, the necessary conditions to support intended benefits being achieved over time must exist in all scenarios. Drawing on expertise, experience, and **knowledge of the local context**, we have graded the likely performance of the repurposed Spode Works in the future as follows:

Urban Futures Method applied to repurposing an industrial heritage asset for arts and culture				
Necessary Conditions	New Sustainability Paradigm	Policy Reform	Market Forces	Fortress World
Continued support from Chamber of Commerce, the local authority, and other partners for a wider international exposure	Key players and partners are put in permanent collaboration to develop industrial heritage assets as a culture-led space of interaction, inclusion, and sharing. In these collaborations, the local authority acts as an enabler and broker rather than an organiser right from the start. However, getting international exposure may contradict the long-term sustainability ethos	Government might have strategic, financial, and regulatory framework for advancing local culture and event industries if the latter are believed to have a significant impact on the nation's economy and wellbeing. Depends on the local organisers' capacity to set a shared event plan and nurture national-local partnerships to deliver that plan with national support	The focus in partnership building is on strengthening the city's unique 'niche' consumer market to stimulate and produce external demand and on identifying and valorising local cultural assets by commercial entities. However, the capacity of the local authority to invest into such an enterprise may not exist	Shrinking urban areas and brownfield sites are usually located outside the rich enclaves on the 'left behind' periphery. No external funding or outside support is available for the poor communities outside the fortress. Moreover, rich elites seek protection and security through secrecy rather than exposure
Capacity to absorb and utilise knowledge produced during arts and culture events at the industrial heritage venue	Local arts & culture-led knowledge exchange activities generate new knowledge to support evidence-based decisions about sustainability challenges and the potential for the shrinking city. They also operate to embed sustainability innovations across other sectors (providing tools, processes, new approaches, and skills)	Culture-led knowledge exchange activities have a vital role to play in tackling social divisions and exclusion. There is explicit national support for knowledge exchange activities across sectors. However, committed local leadership is required to prioritise and curate the knowledge exchange. Success depends on the clear understanding of what each arts & culture event-generated knowledge entails, of its form, of partners and their contribution, and of technologies, enabling such an exchange	Local arts and cultural knowledge resources may become attractive market products (e.g. helping businesses to innovate, provide new models of business practice). Attractiveness depends on how knowledge products are packaged and disseminated, however. Creative industries may struggle to attract start-up private investments for various reasons (e.g., perceived low business value of their knowledge)	Arts and culture-led events may provide a unique opportunity to engage with experiences of deprived communities and to mobilise local innovations and knowledge for an urban transformation. However, the local demand for such events in poor enclaves is limited, whilst the community's capacity to organise them and to absorb arts and culture-related knowledge is extremely low



A local authority with a vision and sustained commitment to improving post-industrial spaces and practicing new ways of working with local stakeholders	Localism means building on each city's distinctive strengths and assets. Local authorities operate as proactive collaborative actors, using direct participatory democracy tools to prioritise and tackle existing barriers to sustainability. They engage with other actors to enhance evidence base and create effective actions	Industrial brownfield areas are key sites for strategic state intervention. However, significant investment and power constraints may exist within the local decision-making. If the decentralisation of political power is pursued, the central government would expect local leaders to build on good evidence, local priorities and align their strategies with national objectives. Devolution is not taken as given, though	Conversion of industrial brownfields into cultural venues may have a value as place branding. However, the project may suffer from inter-city competition and lack of funding. The local authority have to keep abreast of the changing culture demands to sustain the dynamics of its niche consumer market, adapting to different audiences to maintain culture-led innovation	Local communities outside the fortress find it difficult to deal with the negative effect of post-industrialisation and peripheralisation. They struggle to achieve their aspiration for urban regeneration for the lack of political power and fiscal capacity. Creative capacity and new initiatives are constrained for all available resources are devoted to addressing ever rising social problems
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Key: ■ condition highly unlikely to continue in the future ■ condition is at risk in the future ■ condition highly likely to continue in the future

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

➤ Strengthen and enhance partnerships and collaborative networks

Transforming periodical arts and culture activities into permanent local events and organisations with an international recognition depends crucially on how these event promoters set and maintain relations with their existing and future creative arts partners. National, regional, and private sector decision-makers are key as they can provide the necessary resources to sustain such events. Hence, the event organisers have to understand, nurture, and reinforce collaborations with the relevant local, regional, and national actors. In a competitive market context, a shrinking city requires from the local leaders and partners to recognise arts and culture as a lever of local development by providing some upfront start-up investment. This would act as a catalyst for further arts and culture activities and maintain the dynamics of the events market through brokering new conversations and dialogues and developing new programmes. In the context of inter-city competition and power inequalities, a working partnership has to integrate specific measures to strengthen the local leadership and to organise the local community to identify the real potential of its built environment.

➤ Facilitate the production, consumption, and exchange of creative arts and culture knowledge

Not only do culture-led activities contribute to economic value, they also serve as a catalyst for innovation through new products and services and for advancement of novel ideas, knowledge, and ways of working. Public support is very important for knowledge production and exchange activities in the creative sector; hence, local and national governments have to provide a mixture of financial and regulatory stimuli. Yet the unique potential for knowledge exchange that creative arts and culture activities

possess both within the sector and far beyond, and the distinctive character of such activities need to be fully acknowledged. This requires a more specific set of investment and support methods to ensure arts and culture events hosted in industrial heritage buildings operate as a knowledge conduit and a driver of innovation (e.g., 'The Paper Peace Poem' by Robert Montgomery). The focus should be on collaborative development,



sharing, and management of new knowledge to enable the arts and culture participants to think together, to articulate and share information and insights gained, and to codify and co-ordinate the explicit and implicit data generated in the process of an event. To maximise its impact, such a distinctive knowledge-sharing model needs to be supported by umbrella arts and culture organisations through additional funding. In a highly competitive market, arts and culture-led knowledge exchange products have to be made attractive for commercial business and other users. A system should be put in place to engage with different audiences, to understand the range of market needs and wants and, consequently, to package and promote creative arts knowledge products to multiple end-users. Arts and culture-led knowledge exchange activities may also be used as facilitators in tackling deprivation, in finding new ways of supporting poor neighbourhoods in shrinking cities. In this way, arts and culture-led events should engage with the otherwise excluded communities by co-producing new knowledge that reflects those communities' particular circumstances and challenges.



ArtCity 2019 Final Conference: How Do Artists Shape A City?

A participant's take-home message: "Remind people regularly of → Culture need not to be imported if it is Home Grown"

➤ **A visionary, innovative and collaborative local authority**

Shrinking cities are often seen by national governments, especially, finance ministers as unproductive peripheral places needing generous investment and disproportionate policy attention. Yet often, in order to kick-start the regeneration of post-industrial spaces, what really matters is the local leadership that is able 1) to recognise and seize opportunities provided by national policies, and 2) to harness the existing local resources, industrial legacies, and heritage assets. Local authority leaders have to demonstrate how the conversion of a post-industrial space for arts and culture would unlock local growth and innovation. This strategy should explicate how it responds to both local challenges and national priorities, and be honest about the existing barriers, levers, and mechanisms, which the local authority can muster to deliver the agenda. Whilst lobbying the national government for reasonable support, local authority leaders should experiment in finding new governance and funding models for delivering their vision, actively engaging with a variety of cross-sector partners. Confronting the inevitable marginalisation and peripheralisation of shrinking cities requires a strong local leadership team. A visionary and committed local government can take initiative, engage, inspire, provide material conditions for, and curate the formation of internal and external collaborations, which are vital for mobilising local strengths and resources, promoting growth, wellbeing, and social inclusion.

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CITE AS: Mykhnenko, Vlad & Badyina, Anna (2020). 3S RECIPE – Smart Shrinkage Solutions: Stoke-on-Trent (UK) Policy Brief #4. Liveability. University of Oxford. Zenodo. [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3942160](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3942160).

